

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I was going to ask the Senator if he knows of any objection. I was advised that there is one Senator who has indicated opposition to the amendment. I am a member of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian. I have a high regard for the work that is done there. Listening to the description of the Senator from North Carolina, I am inclined to support the amendment. But in view of the fact that there is at least one Senator with a contrary view, I think we ought not go forward without giving him an opportunity to come and express his concerns, if he would like to have an opportunity to do so. My hope would be that we could put in a quorum and see if there is a need to discuss it further; otherwise, I suggest that we accept it on a voice vote.

Mr. BURR. I thank the chairman and recognize there might be an individual who wants to speak in opposition.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LOTT. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3641, DIVISION XI, WITHDRAWN

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, is the amendment pending now and open for debate by Senator COBURN with regard to the Armed Forces Retirement Home?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That division is available for debate.

Mr. LOTT. If I may speak on this subject, I would plead with my colleague from Oklahoma to bear with me and work with us on this. I have a feeling this is something he would like to see done. I think he wants to make sure it is done in the right way. That is my goal, too. I would ask him to hear me out a minute. Let's see if we can work this out and perhaps not force this to a vote, take up the Senate's time, see if we can accommodate everybody's concerns.

Again, this is a place that I have direct personal familiarity with. I was there when it was a high ground on the Mississippi gulf coast beach area with 200-year-old oaks, a beautiful site. In the 1970s, through the good offices and efforts, probably of Senator Stennis, an 11-story retirement home for old sailors was built on that magnificent site in 1976. I was there when the ribbon was cut, and I was so proud of that facility. It was such an exciting thing to see the look in the eyes of those at that time sailors, but it has since become, of course, the Armed Forces Retirement Home. So it is a place of last resort for retirees from all the military branches. That is how far back my history goes with this facility.

In preparation for the storm, to the credit of the leaders there, 300 of the

residents were temporarily evacuated to the Armed Forces home in Washington. The rest moved in with friends and family. The facility is capable of holding as many as 500, and there was always a waiting list. When Katrina came in, the entire first floor was flooded. The exterior of the building was blasted with 150-mile-an-hour winds. The entire electrical room located below ground level was flooded from floor to ceiling.

But from that time to this, I continue to hear from the residents saying: We want to come back; we want to come home. Nothing against the Washington, DC, area, but their family, quite often, what little family they have, lives in that area and they feel so comfortable there, they want to go back.

By the way, the Gulfport facility, unlike the one in Washington, didn't lose money. It was always a moneymaker. But the rooms they had were 90-square-foot rooms, and sometimes it was a retiree and his or her spouse in this very small room. I realized several years ago that whoever designed the building had made some mistakes in terms of the size and the options of those retirees.

I don't know if my colleagues are familiar with black mold, but it is bad stuff, and it comes quickly after a hurricane. You begin to see it on the walls, and it will make you sick. If you don't get it out of there, your building will be sick. You have to go in and basically take everything out but the two by fours. You have to take out the walls in the building—just everything—and replace it with new material, or you are going to have this black mold.

I have really been embarrassed by the way the Defense Department has handled the Gulfport facility in the aftermath of the hurricane. I understand we have had a lot of things on our minds, but basically they haven't done anything to mitigate further decay. They haven't gone in there and repaired that first floor. They have not gotten the ventilation system going to dehumidify the rest of the building. They have not done anything to repair the exterior facing. They have not removed the black mold. And to make matters worse, other than some volunteer work initially done by the Navy Seabees, they basically will not let anybody else come in to try to mitigate the decay that is occurring.

Remember, this hurricane was August of last year and that 11-story building stands there today basically like it was the day after the hurricane. They are letting it just sit there. They even initially refused to let the electric company come through the gate to help restore power. This has not been one of our better moments.

Then we started asking: What can we do? I want to do the right thing for our retired veterans at this site. There have been proposals: Let's just go in and put a Band-Aid on it, clean it minimally, move things off the basement

and the first floor up to the second floor. There are questions about how feasible that is. Let's just patch it up. But the projection of the costs for even that is not good.

The second alternative is to go in and do a major overhaul and make these 90-square-foot rooms bigger—knock a hole in the wall and have two-room suites, really a major overhaul. The amount of money they are talking about, again, is very high.

Then, of course, the last one is to raze the building and build something more modern, safer in hurricanes, more pleasing to the retirees and everybody involved.

My attitude has been, OK, somebody who is an expert tell me what is the right solution. I can go with any of these alternatives, but let's make sure we do it responsibly and let's not have to do it again in 3 or 4 years. And, by the way, is there some way we can control the costs? A novel idea. So that is where we are.

I met with the Pentagon officials, and I think they are trying to come up with an alternative solution. \$64.7 million in appropriated funds was previously provided to study options to rehouse evacuated veterans. Mr. President, \$64 million to study options? Do we need that?

What I am saying and what Senator COCHRAN is saying is let's take the balance of that prior money that can be reprogrammed, and let's couple that with another, I believe, \$176 million and go forward.

My colleague from Oklahoma has said he wants a facility put back in Gulfport. He wants to know what it is, and he wants to know what it is going to cost. Some of the numbers I have been hearing—I don't know if I can put my finger on it right here—are proposals of \$589 million for renovating it or \$389 million to rebuild it. Good gravy. That is real money. I don't like either one of those.

I believe we can repair it or we can come up with this modified proposal Senator COCHRAN has, about which we had some input, that would be a better, more aesthetically pleasing, more livable, cheaper facility to build.

Look at the report. The report makes it clear what the committee is talking about doing: combined with prior unobligated balances, taking the \$176 million the committee has recommended, which shall be used to construct a new, multi-building, campus-style facility on the site occupied by the former Armed Forces Retirement Home.

I think Senator COCHRAN envisions more of a three-story, military-style retirement facility, perhaps with some surrounding dormitories.

I don't want to say how this is going to be done, but the hurricane was 8½ months ago, and we are still waiting. The costs are going up, by the way. Try to get a contractor down there now and see what it costs.

So we are trying to get this done. We are making recommendations because